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ABSTRACT

This report presents a framework for thinking about the multiplicity of charter school management activities and how they connect with each other. It demonstrates that there are three management tasks: building support and legitimacy within the authorizing environment; mobilizing effective operational capacity to deliver services; and defining a proposition or mission to guide the school. The report focuses on: the elements of strategy; strategy and stages of school development; the three elements of charter school management; and performance measurement. It concludes that charter school leaders cannot focus on educational matters alone, but instead must have an understanding of how to manage and position an organization, usually a nonprofit organization, in a changing environment in which they are responsible for the stewardship of resources and the mobilization of support. The report also asserts that charter school management is difficult because it requires both the political skills of traditional public school principals and the operational eye for detail of successful private school headmasters. Finally, it notes that as the charter school movement continues to grow, the need for leaders with strong management skills will become more pressing. (SM)

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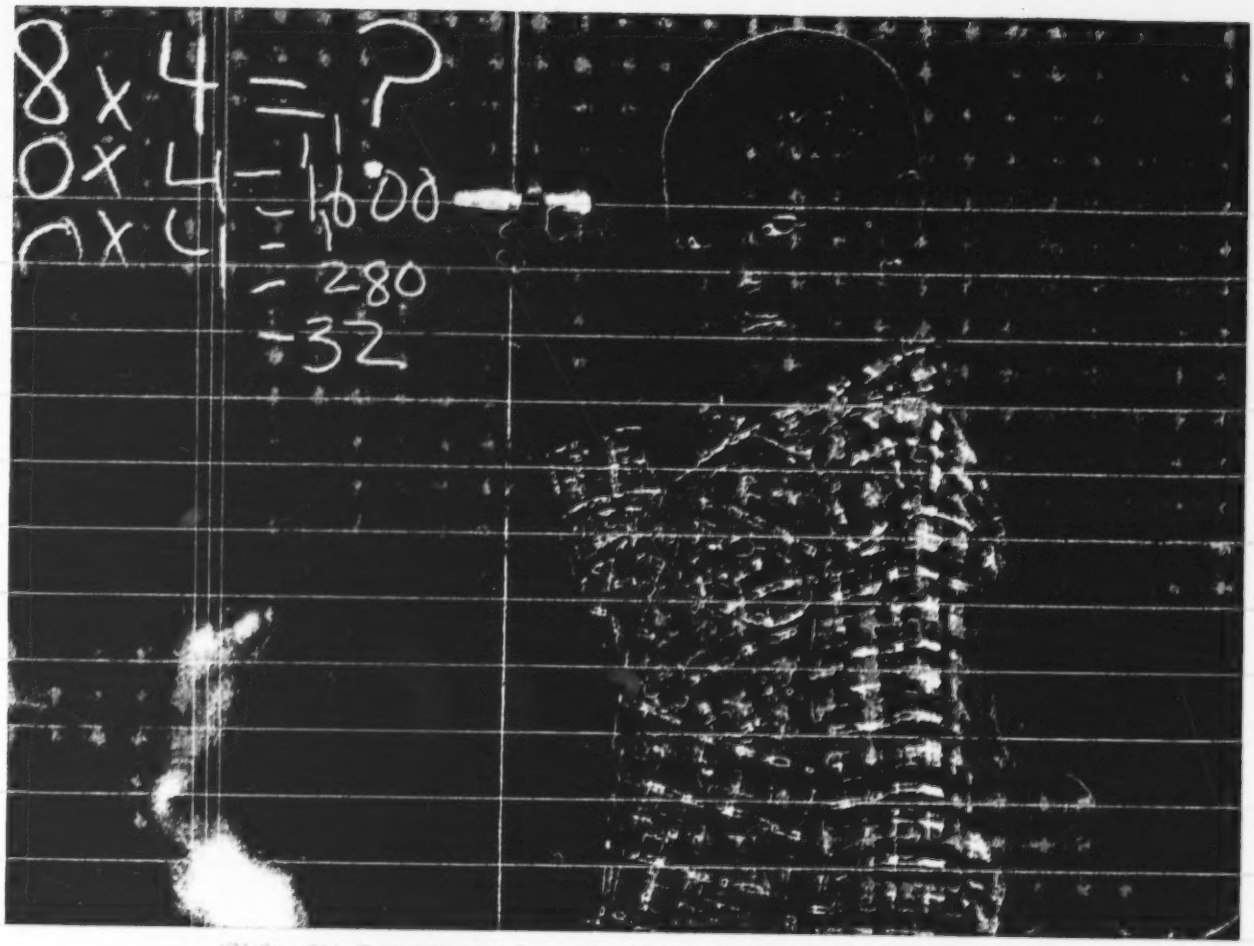

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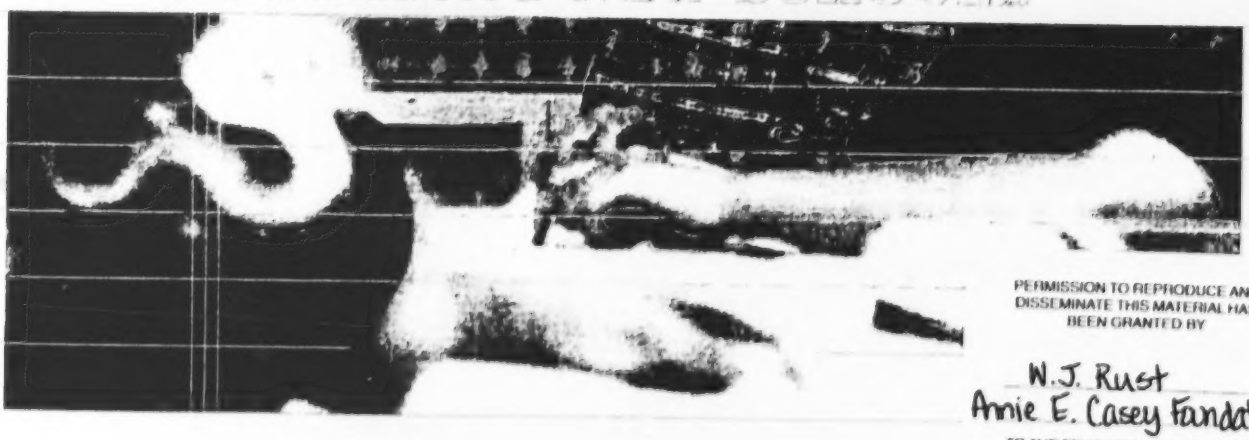

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The Strategic Management of Charter Schools

By Peter Frumkin for the Annie E. Casey Foundation

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Peter Frumkin is associate professor of public policy at Harvard University's John F. Kennedy School of Government and a senior fellow at the New America Foundation. The author gratefully acknowledges the support of the Annie E. Casey Foundation and the research assistance of John Mangin in the preparation of this manuscript. Many of the ideas about strategic management presented here were initially developed by Mark Moore and Dutch Leonard in the Kennedy School's executive programs for public and nonprofit managers. The author owes a substantial debt to the work they have done. Paul Herdman, Frederick Hess, Paul T. Hill, Margaret Lin, Bruno Manno, and Andrew Rotherham all provided helpful comments on an earlier draft of this paper.

ABOUT THE ANNIE E. CASEY FOUNDATION

The Annie E. Casey Foundation is a private charitable organization dedicated to helping build better futures for disadvantaged children in the United States. It was established in 1948 by Jim Casey, one of the founders of United Parcel Service, and his siblings, who named the Foundation in honor of their mother. The primary mission of the Foundation is to foster public policies, human-service reforms, and community supports that more effectively meet the needs of today's vulnerable children and families. In pursuit of this goal, the Foundation makes grants that help states, cities, and neighborhoods fashion more innovative, cost-effective responses to these needs. For more information and a copy of this report, visit the Foundation's website at www.aecf.org.

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PREFACE

As Peter Frumkin observes, "... running a charter school ultimately means managing a large organization. ... Rarely ... do [charter school] entrepreneurs have ... training in strategic management" to help them create a viable and high-performing organization. It's with this problem in mind that the Annie E. Casey Foundation is publishing this manuscript by Peter Frumkin on the strategic management of charter schools, one of several that it has produced on the effort to create individual new schools and networks and systems of new schools.

The Casey Foundation's mission is to improve outcomes and build better futures for disadvantaged children in the United States. The Foundation's vision for education is that all young people—especially those in tough neighborhoods—will graduate from school with the knowledge and skills they need for future success in the worlds of work, family, and citizenship. In pursuing this ambitious vision, the Foundation's education investments support community-based and system-wide efforts that create responsive and effective elementary and secondary schools. These schools strive to fulfill the aspirations that families have for their children and they ultimately strengthen families and neighborhoods.

Over the past seven years, the Foundation's education investments have included support for strategies that both create new schools and improve existing schools. Our new school support has involved investments in individual new schools—including charter, small, and community schools; in organizations that work with individuals and community groups to create new schools; and in network and other system-wide efforts to create systems of new schools.

All of these investments are in support of the Foundation's *Making Connections* initiative, based on the premise that families have a better chance of success when they are connected to three kinds of supports. These supports include: opportunities to work, earn a decent living, and build assets; close ties to social networks that include friends, neighbors, kin, faith communities, and civic groups; and responsive services close to home, including an effective and response system of schools that is based on the following core values and beliefs:

- *High standards.* Set high academic standards for all schools that drive curriculum, instruction, and assessment, stating clearly what all students are expected to achieve.
- *Flexibility and equitable resources.* Give schools—including the least successful schools—the flexibility, resources, and support required to give all students an opportunity to achieve success.
- *Small, personal schools.* Create schools that are small enough to engage all students, so that even the most disadvantaged students are connected to and supported by schools.

- *Effective leadership.* Allow school leaders the autonomy they need to overcome and manage the mission, operational, and strategic alliance challenges they will face in building the capacity they need to create a high-performing organization.
- *Accountability for results.* Hold all schools and districts accountable for the academic achievement of all students, including those who have traditionally had the least success in school.
- *Family empowerment.* Promote meaningful family empowerment and participation in choosing schools, especially among parents who have historically been least likely to participate in school life.
- *Community support.* Make education a larger community commitment to healthy youth and family development.

The Foundation's education investments based on these values and beliefs seek to demonstrate three types of results:

- *Impact:* Evidence that there have been changes in the well-being of the children and families being served.
- *Influence:* Evidence that policies, regulations, systems, practices, or public opinion are becoming more consistent with the viewpoint advocated by the Foundation.
- *Leverage:* Evidence that there have been increases in investments by other public or private funders in Foundation-supported strategies to improve outcomes for children and families.

This new publication on the strategic management of charter schools presents a framework—a way to think about—the multiplicity of charter school—actually, any new school's—core management activities and how they connect with each other. As Frumkin demonstrates, there are three management tasks: building support and legitimacy within the authorizing environment; mobilizing effective operational capacity to deliver services; and defining a value proposition or mission to guide the school. Strategy is a theory about organizational viability and effectiveness. And ultimately, strategic management within the new school context is about the achievement of fit, alignment, and coherence among these core activities.

Bruno V. Manno
The Annie E. Casey Foundation
Senior Associate for Education

1 | Introduction

The charter school movement is now more than ten years old. It has grown steadily from 1991 to the point where today there are over 2,600 charter schools operating in 36 states and the District of Columbia, with 41 states having laws that permit the creation of these independently operating public schools of choice that are accountable for results. These schools continue to be founded across the country in record numbers and enthusiasm for the idea of charters remains strong. Due to the quick and uneven nature of its expansion, however, the movement remains only loosely organized and the quality of the schools varies substantially from one state to another, from one district to another, from one school to another. Compounding this, most charter schools now in existence are three years old or younger and are often beset by financial and managerial challenges associated with newly formed enterprises. Still, the promise of charter schools is great because they represent a potentially potent tool for driving public school reform.

Rarely do charter school entrepreneurs have substantial experience or training in strategic management. This can be a problem because running a charter school ultimately means managing a large organization.

The charter school movement is diverse, and includes schools that have been founded by a wide array of groups for an equally broad set of purposes. While there are some for-profit corporations operating schools, the vast majority of charter schools operate as independent nonprofit organizations that solicit funds from public sources and supplement this core support with private contributions. A few highly visible and successful charter schools are resource rich and attract contributions from around the country, but the majority of schools operate on tight budgets. Charter schools exist within as many policy contexts as there are states with charter laws, and are at times loyally supported in their work and challenged to do more by their many stakeholders.

As the charter movement has spread, the challenge of initiating, growing, and maintaining charter schools has become significant. Many charter school entrepreneurs come to their work with plenty of commitment and experience in education, having studied education theory and

practice. Rarely, however, do these entrepreneurs have substantial experience or training in strategic management. This can be a problem because running a charter school ultimately means managing a large organization. Although targeted technical assistance providers serve important needs within the charter school movement, these specialized services also draw attention to the need for a broader, more integrated approach to strategy in the charter school domain that will help new and experienced charter school leaders improve their management skills.

Despite the diverse and rapidly developing nature of the movement, there are certain fundamental aspects of charter school management—a level or two removed from the minutiae of state law and local education politics—that apply to charter schools everywhere. This paper sketches one way of conceptualizing the essential elements of strategic management in the charter school domain.

2 | The Elements *of* Strategy

To date, the charter school movement has received plenty of advice and assistance on matters of policy and practice. Policy analysts have debated at length the best way to promote the creation of charter schools at the state and federal levels. Meanwhile, education consultants and support organizations have focused on developing and giving advice to schools that will allow them to operate more effectively. In the midst of all these efforts, it has become clear that considerably less work has been done to bring the disparate pieces of charter school management together into a coherent strategic framework. Issues such as curriculum design, financial management, policy advocacy, community relations, staff development, compensation, information technology, and long-term planning have been treated as largely isolated, technical tasks, to be dealt with on the basis of comparative urgency. The result has been an approach to charter school management that consists largely of putting out one fire after another, leaving little time to think more strategically.

The argument advanced here is broader and somewhat more ethereal: Strategic management within the charter school context is ultimately about the achievement of fit, alignment, and coherence among the core activities within a school. By placing the overall achievement of fit as the centerpiece of the idea of strategy, this approach differs quite markedly from technical assistance and from policy analysis. Rather than focus exclusively on how to meet operational challenges or how to navigate the policy domain, I argue that any useful theory of strategic management must identify the core managerial challenges within charter schools and explicate how they connect to one another. While getting better at operational matters and having political skills are absolutely crucial to managing a charter school, they must not be seen as equivalent to managing strategically. Understanding what strategic fit and alignment look like in the charter school field is important because it promises —like all strategies do—to increase effectiveness. In this case that means helping schools produce greater value for the communities they serve. What then are the central managerial challenges in charter schools? I define three main tasks here and my discussion then focuses on their relationship to one another:

The first task is the building of support and legitimacy within the authorizing environment. All organizations require support from the environment in which they operate. Charters schools are no exception. Schools must work to ensure that their multiple external stakeholders, including parents, the local community, state departments of education, and legislators stand behind their work. These external authorizers are in a position to either facilitate or impede the flow of funds into the school. In addition to the authority vested in outside parties, charter schools must interpret their authorizers as including a number of parties that are inside the school, including teachers, administrators, and to a certain extent students. Having support within the organization is critical if managers are to translate successfully a mandate given by outside authorizers into programs and activities that work. The internal and external authorization given to a school will determine what is possible and what is not. No school can operate for long without support and legitimacy. Therefore, most successful schools—and most successful nonprofit organizations, for that matter—end up working very hard over long periods of time to build and maintain support.

The second task within charter schools is the effective mobilization of operational capacity to deliver services. All charter schools must be able to go beyond the enunciation of educational principles and actually organize themselves to carry out activities and deliver

In developing a conception of strategic management within the charter school domain, it is thus possible to begin by asserting that all significant actions must meet three equally important tests. The action must be valuable, it must be operationally feasible or doable, and it must be supportable or authorizable.

services. Capacity includes the full range of physical and human resources that are needed to actually translate promises and intentions into actions. Operational capacity must be understood as covering resources outside the immediate boundaries of the organization and school. It includes the capacity that potential partners around the school (local businesses, community groups, parents, alumni, etc.) possess, which leadership within the school can mobilize toward fulfilling the mission. Expanding and strengthening operational capacity is critical, particularly in environments where resources are scarce and where work is complex, as is the case with charter schools.

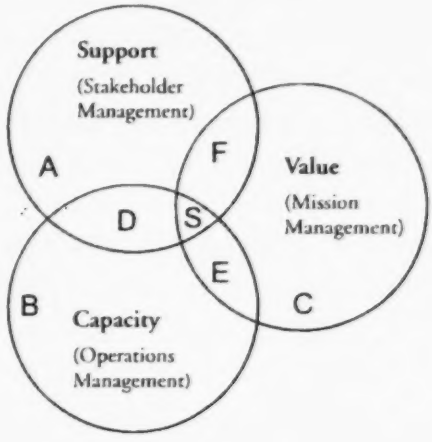
The third task is the definition of a value proposition or mission to guide the school. All organizations must have a purpose that both meets public needs and that coincides with the private values and commitments of those who work in and attend the school. While many management experts believe that one must "start with the mission," it may be more helpful at times to think of mission as contingent on both capacity and support. By contingent, I mean that mission is a product of the capacity and support that an organization possesses. No school can function successfully without a mission that is operationally feasible and that is supported widely. It is in this sense that mission is dependent on capacity and support, not independent or antecedent to them. The inclination to start with mission and then to focus on operations and legitimacy reflects a natural tendency to start with the underlying value proposition and to build strategy around it. In practice, the value proposition does not and cannot exist in a vacuum. It must be part of a more subtle vision that takes into consideration what the supporting environment wants and what is operationally possible. Thus, one of the first and most important steps in developing a meaningful definition of charter school strategic management is to understand mission as something that is contingently produced in relation to both capacity and support.

In developing a conception of strategic management within the charter school domain, it is thus possible to begin by asserting that all significant actions must meet three equally important tests. The action must be valuable, it must be operationally feasible or doable, and it must be supportable or authorizable. If we think about the three central tasks

of charter school management as overlapping domains, the idea of fit and alignment becomes easier to understand and conceptualize. Figure 1 presents these three tests as separate managerial fields (operations management, stakeholder management, and mission management) while also making clear that these fields are by nature and must in practice be overlapping and mutually reinforcing. While the precise character of each of these three managerial challenges takes on special meanings in the charter school context, it is important to begin by conceptualizing them as part of a mutually dependent system. This is the first step in developing a strategic understanding of the work of charter school entrepreneurship.

Figure 1

The Three Elements of Strategic Management



Strategic fit and alignment, the core idea that should drive planning and action, can be understood as finding the "sweet spot" in the triad of circles pictured above. This is the area of overlap marked "S", which brings capacity, support, and value together. Because this is a very abstract and conceptual definition of strategy, it is useful to ask: What does this idea of strategic fit and alignment really entail in practice? How would a manager know when it

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has been achieved? The answer to these questions is that the achievement of fit means that, both through analysis and action, a profound coherence and consistency can be demonstrated between the call of an organization's mission, the needs and desires of stakeholders, and the capacity of the organization to actually carry out the required operations. Thus, achieving strategic fit and alignment means that in making decisions and in taking action, an organization is able to demonstrate that it has considered all three important strategic dimensions of charter school management and found that the proposed course of action simultaneously meets all three critical tests.

In the messy and imperfect world of charter school practice, however, many decisions will end up meeting only one or two of the three tests defined here (marked in Figure 1 as areas "A", "B", and "C"). It is easy to think of strategies that are based on a valuable mission or goal, but that are neither feasible nor supportable. It is also very easy to think of strategies that can be readily authorized by stakeholders, but that are neither valuable nor feasible. And still other actions may be operationally feasible, but are neither truly valuable nor able to garner much support from stakeholders. In such cases, the strategic misalignment will be relatively clear and obvious. In making key managerial decisions, charter school leaders should at a minimum diagnose their strategic position and proposed course of action.

While few of the decisions that fall into these initial three categories are likely to succeed or lead anywhere, it will surely be tempting in many school settings to ignore the lack of alignment that such decisions exemplify. The commitment to mission may be so strong that it leads to both poor operational and political judgments. Or the focus on operations and short-term achievements may be so strong that mission and support are not weighed very carefully in the rush to get things done. Or the drive to please and appease stakeholders may be so pervasive that mission and capacity considerations fall by the wayside. In any and all of these situations, leaders will be tempted to overlook the problem of misalignment.

Obvious and extreme managerial blunders happen in all organizations from time to time and they are relatively easy to diagnose. In charter schools, these mistakes will often manifest themselves, sometimes only after considerable delay, in the form of financial crises, collapsing physical plants, community upheaval, high staff turnover, trouble with regulators, or any number of other problems stemming from an absence of clarity about mission, capacity, and support. The more complex managerial challenges tend to occur when charter

schools are close to achieving fit and alignment, but have fallen just a little short of the mark. It is not uncommon for decisions or actions to meet two out of three tests, but still fail in that one critical element that is missing. In some cases, schools may have feasible operational plans and be able to get key stakeholders behind the operational plans, but have to compromise or abandon core mission considerations in the process (marked in Figure 1 as area "D"). At times, schools will make decisions that are entirely consistent with their missions and operationally fully feasible, but that will unavoidably alienate key stakeholders in the process (marked in Figure 1 as area "E"). At still other times, charters may have plans that reinforce their missions and for which there is plenty of community support, but simply discover, often well into the endeavor, that they lack the operational wherewithal to carry out the work or project (marked in Figure 1 as area "F").

In all cases where alignment and fit are elusive (marked in Figure 1 as areas "A", "B", "C", "D", "E", and "F"), charter school managers face a difficult choice. As a first option, they can accept the boundaries of value, capacity, and support such as they are and seek simply to modify their plans or actions so as to move closer to a position that is strategically sound (e.g., move from position "A" to position "D" and eventually to position "S"). The second option is more radical and requires more work. Charter managers can attempt to change or extend the scope and boundaries of value, capacity, and support so that their plans or actions, while remaining intact, find alignment and fit in a newly defined strategic terrain. This second course of action may entail modifying the mission, mobilizing new forms of operational capacity, or building new sources of support, or any combination of the three. The difference between these two courses of action comes down to whether the boundaries of value, capacity, and support are taken to be static and immutable, or whether they are taken to be dynamic and subject to reshaping. Depending on the nature of the decision or action, and depending on the strategic context surrounding the decision or action, managers will need to make difficult decisions about how to bring their decisions or actions into alignment. Being flexible and having the capacity to adapt and adjust in mid-course thus turn out to be critical characteristics of good managers.

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3 | Strategy *and* Stages *of* School Development

The model of strategy presented here should not be understood as static. Fit, alignment and coherence are never achieved once and for all. Instead, they are continuously pursued as changes inside and outside the school demand regular analysis leading to the frequent revisiting and refinement of strategy. A school's formulation of strategy over time—its search for progress toward its goals—can be understood as falling into three major developmental stages: The first is a start-up stage, during which the school is, among other things, seeking its charter, locating a building, recruiting teachers, meeting the community and answering questions from parents. The second is an expansion stage during which time grade levels and new students are added, new public and private funding sources are located to expand programs, and additional staff are recruited. The third is an institutionalization stage during which time the school attempts to consolidate its gains, regularize procedures, and cement relationships with political and community leaders. Some charter schools move effortlessly across these three developmental stages, while others struggle and even stumble backward as obstacles arise. Still, the work within charters changes over time, as schools evolve and develop. The changing work facing charter entrepreneurs can be sketched by looking at the intersection of the core managerial task (stakeholder, operations, and mission management) and the developmental phase (start-up, expansion, institutionalization phase) within which the school finds itself at any given moment (Figure 2).

		Strategic Tasks		
		Stakeholder Management	Operations Management	Mission Management
School Development Stages	Start-Up Stage	Cultivation	Mobilization	Formulation
	Expansion Stage	Negotiation	Allocation	Adaptation
	Institution-ialization Stage	Legitimization	Integration	Codification

Figure 2

Managerial Work of Charter Entrepreneurs

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START-UP PHASE The start-up phase is the time before the charter has been gained when the entrepreneur is laying the groundwork for the opening of a new school. During this preliminary stage, the managerial work takes three forms. The charter entrepreneur must *cultivate* key regulators within the state board of education who will need to approve the school's application, while also paying close attention to the expressed desires and needs of the community in which the school will be located. In this work, the entrepreneur is acting as both political spokesman and salesman for the school, reaching out to stakeholders who might either have something to contribute to the school's work or who might be in a position to pose a serious obstacle to the school's progress. Thus a key managerial task involves cultivating support so that the school's long journey gets off to a good start.

During the start-up phase, the school must begin to *mobilize* capacity so that it can credibly make the case that the school can do what it says it will do in its application. While no school is in a position to make major financial commitments to secure capacity before the charter is granted, there is still a need to begin to line up resources, particularly when it comes to the physical plant, which will be needed if and when the charter is granted. During the early days of a charter school's founding, it is also important to begin to draw on volunteer labor by community residents and parents, particularly when developing some of the documentation needed during the application process.

From the earliest moments of the process, charter founders must *formulate* a mission that will express the fundamental rationale for the school's existence. Creating an initial mission statement can be a challenging process, involving lots of meetings and many drafts. The mission statement is often a document in which much passion and commitment is vested. Elaborate, facilitated processes are sometimes set up to arrive at a mission that everyone can accept. The problem with spending large amounts of time up-front on honing a mission statement is that it may well require revisiting once experience and reality set in. Nevertheless, the formulation of a clear statement of purpose is an important event in the early stages of starting a charter school because it renders explicit the deeply held beliefs of the founders and outlines a starting direction for a school.

EXPANSION PHASE The expansion phase begins when funds first start to flow into the school and ends when the school has reached its desired size in terms of number of stu-

dents and grades. During this turbulent and demanding period, charter school founders must begin to *negotiate* real agreements with key stakeholders. While contact with parents, community groups, and local political leaders will have already been made, the arrival of public funds and the process of actually starting a school inevitably change the dynamics within and around charter schools. Good managers will be sensitive to these shifts, and begin in earnest to negotiate the terms of support with all key stakeholders. These early discussions may prove crucial because they can define relationships for years to come.

As funds arrive at the school, charter managers will be required to make major operational decisions that will demand that resources be *allocated* wisely among competing needs. Beyond hiring teachers and school staff, charter managers need to expend substantial resources on books, computers, and other school equipment. In making these difficult allocative choices, charter managers must ensure that the school has the operational tools at its disposal that are needed to actually carry out the school's mission. During the expansion stage, one way charter schools can maximize their operational capacity is by forging partnerships with individuals and volunteers in the community. By drawing on capacity from outside the organization, often in the form of donated goods and services, charters are able to use limited public funds for items that absolutely must be purchased. Even after the best efforts at collaboration and careful allocation of funds, operational needs will emerge for which no obvious capacity is present. This will create tough questions about how best to allocate resources over time to meet changing needs and unforeseen expenses.

As a school adds students and grades and aims toward reaching its goals, there will come a time when the mission of the school may need to be *adapted* or modified to meet reality and experience. Since mission statements are drafted in a vacuum of practical experience, it is unrealistic to think that they can be written exactly right from the start. More often than not, mission statements need to be modified either to solidify support of certain stakeholders or to respond to unforeseen events and crises that challenge the mission. In such cases, adaptation is a natural and helpful response that can allow a school to grow and achieve its ends. Often the changes that may be suggested will not go to the heart of the existing mission, but instead require the addition of new, more inclusive language or the clarification of certain terms in the initial formulation. Charter schools that are inflexible about mission matters may find it hard to sustain support and build capacity over time.

INSTITUTIONALIZATION PHASE As charter schools grow and develop, they eventually reach a stage at which they have attained their desired size, stabilized their operations, and are thus in a position to institutionalize their practices. To arrive at this final stage, schools must often go through a trying start-up period and a stressful process of expansion. Given the immaturity of the charter school movement, few schools today are fully institutionalized. When a school has reached this stage, its work consists of managing the *legitimacy* that it has built. This means working with stakeholders to maintain their support over extended periods of time. Being seen as legitimate is critical to a charter school, given the hostility that accompanies their founding in some parts of the existing educational bureaucracy. Successful charter school managers understand the importance of support and work to sustain the hard-won perception that their school is an accepted institutional member of the community.

On the operational side, schools often reach a point when the main challenge shifts from gathering and distributing capacity across functions to one of increasing *integration* and building coordination among the various programmatic elements within schools. To reach this stage, charter schools must have worked out first—through trial and error—a set of discrete operational precepts and principles. Then, during the institutionalization stage, the school is in a position to work on relating them to one another and finding ways to improve the overall operation of the school. A fully integrated set of operational procedures allows a school to act in a highly efficient and coordinated way, even in a turbulent environment. With facilities, staffing, teaching, equipment, and other operational units in place and integrated into a single coherent operational system, charter schools are able to focus on producing educational gains for the students they serve.

During this late stage of development, schools take the opportunity to *codify* their missions. Initially, charter school entrepreneurs may mistakenly devote large amounts of time to setting forward mission statements that will guide their organizations, only later to find out that substantial changes are needed to bring the school into strategic alignment. By viewing the mission as a work in progress that only is considered complete well into the later stages of school development, managers can avoid the substantial amount of trouble that premature mission codification creates. Of course, some flexibility in mission matters will always need to remain.

While this progression from start-up to institutionalization is logical, it certainly is not inevitable. Stable, productive charter schools require attention to the three aspects addressed in this paper: They need a clear mission, broad-based stakeholder support, and significant operational capacity. Most important of all, they need a strategic vision of how these central managerial tasks within charter schools fit together into a tightly woven whole that is greater than the sum of the disparate parts. In short, schools need strategy.

4 | The Three Elements of *Charter School* Management

To give more definition to the three main tasks connected to the strategic management of charter schools, it is important to define more fully the substantive content of mission management, operations management, and stakeholder management in the charter school context. Work in all three areas changes and evolves over time, but there is still a set of basic analytic distinctions to be made within each area.

> *Stable, productive charter schools require attention to three aspects: They need a clear mission, broad-based stakeholder support, and significant operational capacity.*

STAKEHOLDER MANAGEMENT Thriving charter school entrepreneurs often cite strong stakeholder relationships as the central ingredient in their success. One common argument for charter schools has been that they can be a remedy to the bureaucratic distance between public schools and their stakeholders, especially parents. Charter schools that hope to survive must engage parents; neighborhood organizations; government officials at federal, state, and local agencies; and private contributors that are all in positions to provide support in the areas of services, facilities, and funds. The central goal of stakeholder management is

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to build support and legitimacy within the authorizing environment that surrounds charter schools. To do this well, managers need to focus on multiple constituencies simultaneously.

Parents

Although it is premature to declare the charter school movement a success or failure, it is safe to say that charter schools have proven themselves to be much better than traditional public schools at doing one thing, namely involving parents in their children's education. The emphasis on parental involvement arises primarily from the recognition that many of the problems in traditional public schools—problems that can and do show up in charter schools—start at home. By incorporating parents into school culture, problems that have seemed intractable in the past might turn out to be more amenable to change in the charter context. The move to involve parents is also a function of the fact that charter schools operate on a school choice model: If parents are not satisfied, they can withdraw their children and put them in other schools. If this happens too often, the financial implications for the charter school that is abandoned will be serious and may lead to its closure. The best way to keep parents satisfied is to keep them informed and for their children to thrive. Parental involvement is a crucial component of both of these outcomes.

Charter schools have offered a variety of ways for parents to become involved, from sweat-equity volunteering to school governance. Many charter schools operate parent resource centers and train staff to incorporate parents into school culture. Charter schools have also sought parental participation in the start-up or design phase, sometimes creating community workshops around school design. This has proven to be an excellent way to clarify the needs and expectations of both the parents and the school. Some schools have even developed contracts in the attempt to foster parent participation, while others have built advisory boards on which parents serve. In all of these efforts, charter schools have learned early on the importance of reaching out to parents and seeking their support and authorization.

Neighborhood and Community Groups

Many charter schools are communities in and of themselves. They are self-governing, mission-driven organizations that are voluntary in nature and that span economic and social divides. Students, teachers, and staff choose to participate in a given charter school to a degree that does not have a ready equivalent in most public schools. There is also an intimacy in

many charter schools that is lacking elsewhere. Part of this is a function of charter school size: The average charter school has 150 to 175 students compared to 500-plus in the average public school. There is also an intentionality, a desire to become a community, that makes charter schools distinctive. Charter schools fashion themselves as a community, but they are much more dependent on outside entities than traditional public schools. They must connect with the communities existing concentrically around them. Few charter schools could make it past the start-up phase without assistance from a variety of neighborhood and community organizations.

The biggest problem for new charter schools is finding an appropriate and affordable facility. While few organizations have entire buildings to donate, churches and community organizations such as the Catholic Church, YMCA, or Boys and Girls Clubs often allow start-up charter schools to use unneeded space. Once operating, charter schools often rely on community organizations for programmatic support and curricular enrichment. Charter schools that are open long hours—8 a.m. to 8 p.m. instruction and programs are not uncommon—obviously cannot expect teachers and staff to remain present through the entire school day. Many of these schools use volunteers from local organizations to teach classes and provide support after regular school hours. Neighborhood groups are thus in a position to provide critical support to charter schools. Working to secure this support and finding creative ways to use it are central tasks for charter school managers.

Charter schools need political support to operate successfully. Thus, one of the central elements in stakeholder management involves interacting effectively with the local political and regulatory bodies that authorize, oversee, and fund charter schools.

Government

Charter schools need political support to operate successfully. Thus, one of the central elements in stakeholder management involves interacting effectively with the local political and regulatory bodies that authorize, oversee, and fund charter schools. Across the country, a patchwork quilt of state charter school laws defines the policy context in which charter schools operate. The laws define how much impact that charter schools can have on public education within the state. Charter laws are most usefully classified along a "strong to weak" spectrum, with "strong" laws being favorable to starting charter schools and "weak"

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laws being unfavorable. The consequences for managers of these differences are important and can make the work of stakeholder management either perfunctory or all-consuming.

Some states have weak charter laws that permit only school districts or local education agencies (LEAs) to grant charters. LEAs are often hostile to the charter school movement because of the inroads charter schools make into LEA funding and authority. Furthermore, LEAs administer the public school system, and have difficulties adapting methods of standard oversight and accountability practices to charter schools. A combination of hostility and institutional rigidity on the part of LEAs tends to put pressure on charter schools to conform to public school models. Other states have strong charter laws that allow several different entities to grant charters. These can include state boards incorporated for the purpose, colleges and universities, and LEAs, among others. In these states, charter schools can circumvent potentially hostile bureaucracies and deal directly with state boards or universities, which tend to be more open to and supportive of charter schools. This model is almost always less stifling, allowing for the flexibility and programmatic differentiation necessary to the charter school project.

A few states permit only currently operating public schools to convert to charter school status. While this means that charter schools will not have to worry about finding facilities or staff, charter schools under this policy tend not to differ meaningfully from other public schools in the area, defeating a key purpose of charter schools. Other states allow parents, teachers, outside entrepreneurs, colleges and universities, and even for-profit companies to apply for charters. This kind of policy does not by itself guarantee a diverse charter school landscape, but may be a significant precondition.

Weak charter school laws that do not grant charter schools fiscal and legal independence from LEAs seriously detract from charter school autonomy and make the task of stakeholder management quite hard. In these states, charter schools lack budgetary and programmatic flexibility. Without legal independence, charter schools are bound by the decisions of local school boards, often the entities least willing to give charter schools a chance. In such instances, managing this relationship can be a demanding and complex task. Other states not only give charter schools fiscal and legal independence, but also incorporate them as their own LEAs. These schools are free to choose an educational program, a system of organization and governance, and suppliers for books and materials. Charter schools in this situation are also free to hire whom they choose and are free from LEA-negotiated collective

bargaining agreements. Strong charter school laws free charter schools from most procedure-based accountability in favor of accountability systems that allow for greater educational diversity and experimentation.

Depending on the policy context within which a charter school operates, the difficulty and importance of managing relations with government overseers will vary considerably. In almost all cases, however, knowing and understanding the political context and key government actors are essential to ensuring that support for charter schools is maintained or expanded. Some charter school entrepreneurs have enlarged the task of stakeholder management to include advocacy efforts such as working to improve charter laws. This approach to stakeholder management is more proactive and can be expensive and time consuming, but it holds forth potentially large benefits. No matter whether charter schools seek merely to work within the existing policy context or change it, government is a critical stakeholder that must be managed.

Teachers' unions have opposed charter school legislation at federal and state levels, or, failing that, sought to weaken charter laws until they no longer pose a threat to the status quo.

Public School Establishment

Across the country, the charter school movement has garnered broad-based public support. Nevertheless, it receives its most vociferous opposition from the public school establishment. Teachers' unions have opposed charter school legislation at federal and state levels, or, failing that, sought to weaken charter laws until they no longer pose a threat to the *status quo*. On a local level, superintendents and school boards, again with the help of teachers' unions, have attempted to stifle the proliferation of charter schools or gain control of the administration and oversight of charter schools.

This should not come as a surprise, given that a fundamental aim of the charter school movement is to break the LEA-level monopoly on public education. Under the current system, states organize public schools into districts, usually with a superintendent; an elected or appointed school board; a unionized, state board-certified workforce of teachers and staff; and a captive student body. The culture is highly politicized, but firmly regulated and entrenched. Everyone from the superintendent to the textbook suppliers has a stake in the system. Depending upon the particular features of state law, charter schools can divert from districts a significant number of students and, with them, funding, teachers, and authority.

Charter schools in states with stronger charter laws are free to hire non-unionized, non-certified teachers, and are not bound by collective bargaining agreements, thereby weakening union influence within the district.

Freedom from the union is crucial to charter schools, not only for general reasons of autonomy, but also because union involvement makes it much more difficult to shut down charter schools that fail. The success of an outcomes-based accountability model depends upon the threat of closure being present. If the threat disappears, charter schools lose a strong performance motive—the survival incentive—and the quality of instruction will most likely suffer.

At the very least, competition from charter schools, where it exists, forces public school teachers to work harder. Charter school teachers, especially during the start-up phase, are notorious for putting in 12-hour days, with administrators often working longer. Of course, teachers' unions and local education departments view some of the new responsibilities and approaches as threatening. Charter schools must be sensitive to this perceived threat and manage their relationship with district representatives and unions carefully. It is in no one's interest to let hostility and suspicion breed. Good management of stakeholders thus demands that the existing public education bureaucracy be handled carefully and strategically so that it provides—if not supports—at least acceptance of the changes that charter schools can bring.

Private Funders

In seeking to achieve their purposes, charters must struggle with the implications of their financial position. Because they receive a great preponderance of their funding from government, charters share many management challenges with other nonprofits, especially human service providers that enter into contracting relationships with federal, state, and local governments. Research on nonprofit funding has shown that there is a danger of "mission distortion" that is associated with a single, large, external source of funding. Single sources of funding can place nonprofits in financially precarious positions and force them to conform to the expectations of funders to ensure continued survival. Charters are vulnerable to these pressures because of their dependence on public funds. Some schools have sought to protect their autonomy and their operational independence by cultivating private contributions to diversify their funding streams and achieve some measure of capacity

that is not dependent on government. Private grants can supplement per pupil funding from states and localities or can be used to develop and carry out new initiatives for which public funds are not available.

The range of private contributors that can be recruited and turned into stakeholders is very broad. It includes individual donors, drawn from around the community or from alumni of the school, foundations, corporations, federated funders such as the United Way, and other public-sector funders, especially at the federal level. Cultivating and managing relations with these potential supporters requires a skill set that many educators do not possess initially. Fundraising is not part of the curriculum of graduate schools of education. However, the desire to provide special services or the need for new equipment has driven some charter entrepreneurs to develop their fundraising skills in order to generate new forms of support for their school. The cultivation of private funders to charter schools may begin during the start-up phase on a small level. However, once a school reaches a certain level of maturity and wants to develop programmatically in ways that local education funding may not immediately allow, the development of new streams of contributed revenue is an appealing alternative for charter schools.

During the processes of mission formulation and revision, charter school leaders must delicately negotiate the demands of multiple funders while retaining integrity in the school's mission. Charter schools must not only incorporate the demands from parents, funders, and other stakeholders into their mission, they must also maintain mission discipline and persuade stakeholders to compromise and give up on some of their demands. There is a danger that being too willing to adapt the mission to each stakeholder will create a school organization with a mission so broad and shallow that it will be unworkable and uninspiring. Strategic stakeholder management may in some cases require that certain outside stakeholders be excluded. But this option must be balanced with the need to maintain enough students, funders, and supporters to keep the school running.

In the end, the construction of ties with parents, community groups, government officials, representatives of the education establishment, and private funders can help sustain charter schools financially and operationally. This is not a one-way street: Support from the stakeholders makes schools better, and school involvement with the stakeholders can contribute to the construction of new forms of social capital. For this reason, stakeholder management is an essential task of charter school strategic management.

OPERATIONS MANAGEMENT A critical element in the development of a strategic management plan within the charter school environment involves the building of operational capacity. "Operational" capacity is conceptually different from "organizational" capacity. The idea of organizational capacity assumes that capacity exists only within the boundaries of the school and the central managerial challenge consists in getting the most out of the resources that belong to the school. This is far too limiting, however. The idea of operational capacity is broader in that it allows that significant capacity may actually exist outside the formal boundaries of the school and reside in partnerships, joint efforts, and collaborations, which draw on outside actors and organizations in the quest to build capacity. This idea of operational capacity is better suited to the charter school environment in that few schools could ever succeed if they had to possess internally all the capacity needed to educate children. In reality, the most successful charter school entrepreneurs are those who are able to mobilize substantial amounts of capacity outside the school and deploy it strategically to fulfill the mission.

Physical and Human Capital

Charter schools often have to do more with fewer resources than traditional public schools. At the same time, the continued existence of charter schools depends upon their being able to educate children better than public schools. Government agencies charged with overseeing charter schools frequently write this stipulation into the terms of the charters they grant. However, many states grant charter schools less than the average per pupil funding allocated to public schools. This would be an amusing conundrum if the operational pressures that result were not so intense. The unique challenges charter schools face exacerbate this operational bind, especially during the start-up phase when their capacity is very limited.

A common early capacity problem is finding a facility. Few charter laws provide for facility costs. Moreover, charter authorizers expect charter founders to find buildings before the charter is awarded and then use the per pupil allocation they receive to cover facilities costs. Finding an appropriate building is difficult, even if funds are available up-front. Some charter schools have tried to build using the most economical materials and methods available, while others have sought to expand the scope of their capacity by striking up partnerships with

established organizations that have excess space. Whatever solution they settle on, charter schools must solve the facilities problem early on in their quest to build the operational capacity needed to succeed.

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Unlike public schools, most charter schools are required to purchase their own goods, such as office supplies and textbooks, and services, such as maintenance and student lunch provision. This freedom gives schools an opportunity to reach out to the broader community as a way of increasing operational capacity and possibly cutting costs in the process. In some cases, it may be wise to develop a relationship with a "bundling firm" that is able to meet capacity needs at a lower cost through economies of scale. In some districts, public schools have adopted charter school suppliers and purchasing systems for computers and other items because of the vast amounts of money saved by circumventing traditionally inefficient public school supply chains. When it comes to services, charter school entrepreneurs have also found that it can be helpful to cultivate friendships with bankers, lawyers, and accountants, with the goal of benefiting from the in-kind donation of professional advice.

The most important operational decision that charter founders face has little to do with buildings or office equipment, however. A defining moment for charter schools comes when the human capital needed to operate a school is acquired through the hiring of teachers and key staff. Schools must have the capacity to teach effectively, but they must also locate people who are committed to the school's mission. Building the teaching capacity of a school will have a profound effect on the ability of the school to execute its mission. Beyond teachers, the human capital of a school includes all of the support staff who allow the school to function on a day-to-day basis. Only when a charter school has located, secured, motivated, and retained qualified personnel at all levels can the school claim that it has the capacity to deliver on its mission. New charter schools have learned about meeting these special operational challenges from peer institutions, particularly in states with more established charter

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school programs: Most new schools, where they can, try to hire a resilient mix of young and old staff, combining both enthusiasm and experience.

In trying to build staff, charter schools often leverage their independence from unionized labor policies to attract and retain the best teachers. Charter recruiters should look for talented professionals who might be put off by a traditional public school but are attracted by the entrepreneurial spirit of a charter school. By and large, charter schools have tended to underutilize their freedom from regimented union compensation policies. Whereas most unions enforce a pay scale tied to seniority, charter schools can implement pay scales that are based on performance. Introducing this sort of compensation policy can create an environment where excellence and dedication to students are valued.

Broadening Capacity

In putting together the key operational building blocks needed to support a charter school, it is important to recognize that critical contributions will come — out of necessity — from outside the school itself. Local volunteers, parent groups, neighborhood associations, and other school stakeholders will be needed to carry out school programs. Only by enlarging the operational sphere to include these key actors, can charters hope to mobilize the capacity they need to carry out their missions. The fact that capacity exists and must be cultivated both within and outside the school reveals that operations management and stakeholder management, by necessity, overlap and intermingle. Success at one breeds success at the other. Good charter managers understand this and work to achieve the kinds of partnerships and community collaborations that will allow their schools to overcome some of the financial limitations that they confront.

Building and sustaining capacity may not be the most exciting part of charter school management. In fact, charter school entrepreneurs may be drawn to the more creative aspects of founding a school — defining a mission or developing an educational program — at the expense of the more mundane details of day-to-day operations. Developing managers with eye for operational detail has never been a focus of graduate schools of education, which are organized so as to emphasize substantive issues such as the design of curricula, not the most efficient way to operate a payroll. However, experience has shown that too much "education vision" and too little attention to detail can lead schools to open without adequate planning or to attempt an expansion too quickly.

The disconnect between vision and operational reality can create another problem that plagues charter schools, namely staff burnout. Twelve-hour days, failed plans, harried improvisations, and multiple setbacks characterize the start-up phase of many new charter schools. Getting through these tough times requires a willingness to see charter school strategic management as involving not just an elevated educational vision, but operational savvy. Because operational needs can be especially demanding for a school that is without the traditional physical and human capital infrastructure that traditional schools rely on, it may help to divide the leadership of the school so that one person is almost exclusively devoted to managing operations while another focuses on learning. This sort of divided leadership may take the form of pairing a principal with a chief of operations or an executive director with an academic director.

Just as it is important to understand the intersection of capacity and support, it is also critical to grasp the connection between mission and capacity. Finding ways to connect the mission to the difficult and sometimes mundane tasks of operating a school require considerable strategic acumen.

MISSION MANAGEMENT A clearly articulated, widely agreed upon mission is essential to every charter school. Essential in two senses of the word: First, charter schools cannot function without a mission. Founding and operating a charter school is difficult enough. It is nearly impossible to withstand the inevitable buffeting of the educational environment without a clear and compelling mission to hold on to and to look to for direction. Second, having mission is what differentiates and defines the identity of a charter school. "Mission" has practically become synonymous with "charter." Without distinctive missions grounded in individual and community values, it is hard to imagine how charter schools would be much different in character from the vast universe of public schools.

Having a mission and managing a mission are, however, two quite different things.

Elements of Mission

The general mission of charter schools writ large is to improve American public education by increasing school choice and catalyzing competition within the public school system. Individual charter schools are founded in response to particular problems and needs. Charter school entrepreneurs most often want to realize a particular educational vision by

helping a special student population or giving a community educational opportunities that may have long been absent. Because visions of public education vary considerably and because needs vary from community to community, each charter school's mission will in some way be unique.

Still, effective missions do have certain common features. A mission will usually begin with a statement of *general values*. These values explain the orientation of the school, and help to provide an underlying coherence to various aspects of school operation such as the curriculum, administration, and conduct. Some charter schools, particularly some in inner cities, value order and discipline. Students wear uniforms, sit in assigned seats, and address adults and each other with an unusual degree of formality. Other schools are intentionally more free and open. Some schools emphasize principles of social justice or environmentalism, and incorporate community service into faculty, staff, and student life.

Because visions of public education vary considerably and because needs vary from community to community, each charter school's mission will in some way be unique.

Many charter schools are founded to realize a particular educational vision, but all charter schools should have a mission that defines an *educational approach*. This aspect of the mission answers the important question as to *how* students will learn. At a discipline-focused school, student learning might emphasize student drills, hard work, and frequent student assemblies. A more open school might adopt a Montessori or Waldorf method. Many charter schools take a technology-based approach to student learning, emphasizing computer literacy. In such cases online learning and Internet research may figure prominently.

Missions also describe a *curricular focus*—"what" students learn, as opposed to "how." A back-to-basics curricular focus has proven popular and emphasizes reading and math skills. Some charter schools attempt to diversify their curricula to include more arts and language instruction than is typically found in public schools. Their goal is to develop special capacity to teach and inspire students to appreciate the arts. Others emphasize math or science skills as a way of preparing students for the changing workplace. Still others pick curricula with a multicultural or culture-specific bent.

A mission identifies the target *student population*. This means limiting the school to certain grade levels and identifying a pool of potential students. Several questions must then be answered: Will the charter school

take anyone from the district? Will it take students from outside the district? Will the school concentrate on at-risk youth, students for whom English is a second language, or students returning to school after having dropped out?

Lastly, it is important for charter schools to use their missions as an opportunity to define ambitious but reasonable *goals and expected outcomes*. This is important for two reasons. First, goals that are clearly articulated and subject to agreement are much easier to aim for, and hence achieve, than goals that are imprecise or unarticulated. Second, clear goals can serve as a basis of evaluation during the charter review process. Goals most often revolve around student achievement, and can include improving average standardized test scores by a certain number of points, teaching students to demonstrate certain core skills or competencies, or achieving a certain earned student promotion rate.

Purposes of Mission

A mission is the first opportunity for charter school entrepreneurs to present a coherent vision of a new school. In constructing a mission, key stakeholders must converge upon a single well-considered understanding of what they want their school to be. While there is some temptation for the founder to present a vision to the community, the process of formulating a mission must involve a range of stakeholders and through discussion—often through long and drawn out deliberations—a better plan emerges than any one group could have formulated on its own. Appealing from the start to a broad-based consensus can help avoid one of the most common start-up problems for charter schools: Many new schools have been handicapped by the heavy-hand of their founder who created a mission from the top-down, rather than from the bottom- or grassroots-up. When the mission is nothing other than the inspired—or not so inspired—vision of one person, clashes with parents, teachers, community members, regulators, and staff will be hard to avoid.

While it is difficult to over-emphasize the importance of a clear mission, defining and then managing the mission of a charter school requires a willingness to never view mission as immutable or ever fully completed. A mission statement is the primary consideration upon which a charter application is approved or denied, and is crucial to garnering community support. It must therefore be clear and concise. After a school's founding, the mission statement becomes a constitution of a sort, and a basis for decision-making when the school faces unforeseen circumstances and crises. It gives charter evaluators, teachers and staff, parents,

and the community a sense of what to expect and, perhaps more importantly, what not to expect. It can help to ensure a good match between students and school. It cannot, however, be permitted to become inflexible or ossified over time. Mission management by its very nature must assume that refinement and improvement are both possible and desirable.

5 | Performance Measurement

As charter school leaders attempt to wrestle with the challenges that arise during all three phases of school development and across the three main tasks of school management, they usually face an important constraint. The work they do must be measured and the performance of their school must be tracked. Measurement is often thought to be the centerpiece of an accountability system, one that can ensure that charter schools are tethered to the broader public school system.

The topic of evaluation looms large in the charter school context. In part, this is due to the fact that charter schools still operate in many places where teachers' unions and legislatures are suspicious of the idea of independently operated public schools. Many charter school founders view their stakeholders as potential adversaries that must be won over and turned into supporters. A key element in any such offensive are school performance data. Deciding what to measure, when to measure, and how to interpret the results represents a strategic challenge of considerable proportions. It is easy to evaluate and measure, but much harder to use performance data strategically.

By measuring their school's performance, charter school managers are in a position to do three important things. First, good performance data allow school managers to communicate with the authorizing environment and secure the support they need to do their work. At a time when funds for educational programs are increasingly limited, the ability of charter schools to point to successful educational programs they have carried out is a potent tool for mobilizing support for funding. After all, few legislators want to be accused of failing to provide the best education that is available. As a consequence, when success is demonstrated

in one school, evidence of this success can be used by others to mobilize support in other districts and even states. For charter managers, the ability to point to evaluation research can also be a potent tool for building legitimacy and support for further spending, once a charter school has demonstrated that its approach produces results.

The second use of evaluation research in charter schools is connected to the need of managers for information that will allow them to improve operational performance. In principle, the use of evaluation research can help structure programs that have a higher probability of success. By examining and understanding what happened within their schools, managers can make small or large design changes to remedy known problems and focus resources on activities that have proven most valuable. The use of evaluation data can allow charter school managers to shorten the learning curve and get better quicker at allocating resources and managing capacity. In this sense, performance measurement is a critical ally of capacity building within schools.

The use of evaluation data can allow charter school managers to shorten the learning curve and get better quicker at allocating resources and managing capacity. In this sense, performance measurement is a critical ally of capacity building within schools.

The third use of evaluation research in the charter school field is the most important, though often the least understood. Collecting, examining, and discussing evaluation research can be an important way of defining and reckoning the public value to be produced. Working with evaluation data can open up conversations about what is important to measure and, ultimately, what objectives are worth pursuing. Performance measurement can thus be a tool for articulating and coming to consensus about the nature of the missions that charter schools are trying to realize. While this third function may appear less central than the first two, it can in many circumstances be more important. The act of defining what is worth measuring comes down to defining mission. This can be a profound focusing exercise for a school, one that demands that mission and goals be clearly specified. Doing this work can also be a useful tool for building consensus and solidarity among teachers and staff about what the school is seeking to achieve.

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In the pressurized environment that now surrounds many charter schools, performance measurement is often limited to standardized test scores and used primarily to fulfill the first function of evaluation described here, namely building legitimacy and support. This is, however, a very impoverished and limited understanding of the uses of performance measurement. As a consequence, when charter school leaders marshal data about their school's performance they should strive for two goals.

First, they should collect data that they believe will be helpful to them, not just in meeting the accountability demands of their authorizers, but also to the school's needs for information that will allow it to improve operationally. This means collecting data not just on student achievement, but also on matters such as teacher job satisfaction, parental satisfaction with the school, student satisfaction with school technology, and other indicators that might allow the school's leaders to spot trouble areas early and respond accordingly, or locate areas of real strength and build on them. Second, beyond collecting a broad range of data, charter school managers should focus their attention on how the process of performance measurement is understood by their stakeholders. Rather than presenting evaluation as a way to monitor and control, measuring the performance of a school should be understood as a critical way to track the progress toward fulfilling mission.

Performance measurement is thus a critical element of introducing strategic thinking into a school. It requires a commitment of time and resources, and most importantly creativity, to ensure that the work of assessment allows greater clarity about the state of alignment and fit within the school.

6 | Conclusion

There is a long tradition in many schools of education of focusing the attention of students on building an educational philosophy and developing innovative curricula. This approach may have worked when public schools enjoyed a near monopoly and when many

graduates planned to spend most of their careers within the public school establishment. As this monopoly has weakened and as charter schools have become an increasingly important instrument of change within the system, the needs of school leaders have taken on a new dimension. Charter school leaders cannot focus on educational matters alone, but instead must have an understanding of how to manage and position an organization, usually a nonprofit organization, in a changing environment in which they are responsible for the stewardship of resources and the mobilization of support. It is within this context of a new managerial imperative that the approach to school management described here must be understood.

Charter school management is difficult work because it requires both the political skills of traditional public school principals and the operational eye for detail of successful private schools headmasters. Finding people who are capable of meeting this managerial challenge is not easy and there is no denying that some charter schools do fail due to poor management. It would, however, be presumptuous to say that an infusion of management savvy into the ranks of school leadership will necessarily propel the charter school movement toward greater levels of public support. It would be far safer to say that improved managerial skills in the ranks of charter school managers cannot help but increase the chances that a school will perform well and have a better chance of achieving its goals.

Charter schools are usually given their push by one individual or a small group of individuals with a strong clear vision of how they want to run their school and the ability to bring others on board with this mission. This visionary energy should not be discounted as an engine for change in the schools. However, a central claim here is that mission dynamism is important to school development beyond the initial founding. Some flexibility in mission refinement will help schools draw from the strengths of their stakeholders and meet the challenges that occur as schools expand in scale. By understanding mission as at least in part contingent on support and capacity, charter school leaders can begin to see in their work the central challenge of achieving strategic fit, alignment, and coherence.

As the charter school movement continues to grow, the need for leaders with strong management skills will only become more pressing. The model of strategy presented here is designed to give those interested in improving the quality of charter school management a usable model to frame and focus this important work.

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